

3. Guidelines for Historic Properties

This chapter presents design guidelines that apply to all properties which are considered to be historic resources in the Houston Street area. Some properties have been identified in historic surveys, while many others that may not be officially designated may also have significance. In general, a building must be at least fifty years old before it may be evaluated for potential historic significance.

A basic tenet of preservation is to minimize intervention with the historic building fabric and, therefore, in the treatment of an historic building, it is best to preserve those features that remain in good condition. For those features that are deteriorated, repair is preferred, rather than replacement; but when replacement is necessary, it should be in a manner similar to that seen historically.

The guidelines contained in this chapter are organized into the following design topics:

- Character-defining features
- Design of alterations
- Storefronts
- Storefront glass
- Windows and doors
- Entries
- Awnings and canopies
- Kickplates
- Cornices
- Facade materials
- Design of additions

Why Preserve Historic Resources?

Historic resources make up a key part of the area's character and represent tangible links to the past. They are assets that attract visitors, shoppers, businesses and residents. If the character of the historic resources is strong enough, their attraction can foster the rehabilitation of buildings and support renewed economic activity.

Reusing historic buildings offers a number of advantages over the alternative: constructing new buildings. These advantages include the following:

- Providing a link with the past
- Establishing a distinct market image
- Quickly making a building available for occupancy
- Providing an attractive image for the area
- Supporting heritage tourism strategies
- Reinforcing Houston Street ambiance

Across the nation, thousands of communities promote historic preservation because doing so contributes to livability, enhances quality of life, minimizes negative impacts on the environment and yields economic rewards. Many property and business owners are also drawn to historic resources because the quality of construction is typically quite high and the buildings usually are readily adaptable to contemporary uses.

Construction Quality

Many of the historic resources in the Houston Street area are of high quality construction. Although some are deteriorated, most retain sound building systems and high quality materials. By comparison, in today's construction, materials of such quality are rarely available today and comparable detailing is very expensive. The high quality of construction in historic buildings is therefore a "value" for many people.

Environmental Benefits

Preserving an historic structure is also a sound environmental conservation policy because "recycling" the structure saves energy and reduces the need for producing new construction materials. Three types of energy savings occur:

- First, energy is not consumed to demolish the existing building and dispose of the resulting debris.
- Second, energy is not used to create new building materials, transport them and assemble them on site.
- Finally, the "embodied" energy, that which was used to create the original building and its components, is preserved.



A preservation project typically has a higher percentage of its total costs devoted to labor and to the purchase of locally-available materials.

Economic Benefits

Preservation projects also contribute more to the local economy than do new building programs because each dollar spent on a preservation project has a higher percentage devoted to labor and to the purchase of locally-available materials. By contrast, new construction typically has a higher percentage of each dollar spent devoted to materials that are produced outside of the local economy and to special construction skills that may need to be imported as well. Therefore, when money is spent on rehabilitating a building, it has a higher “multiplier effect,” keeping more money circulating in the local economy.

Basic Criteria For Replacing Historic Features

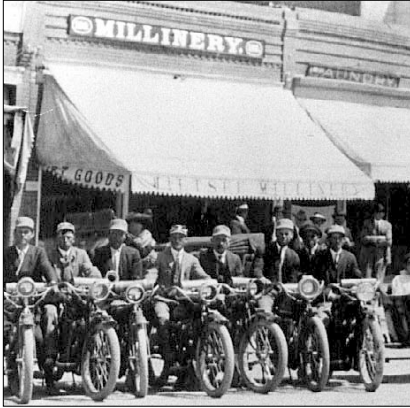
A major tenet of the preservation of historic resources is to minimize intervention with the historic building fabric and to retain its integrity; therefore, in the treatment of an historic building, it is best to preserve those features that remain in good condition. For those features that are deteriorated, repair is preferred, rather than replacement; but when replacement is necessary, it should be in a manner similar to that seen historically.

In order to apply this tenet, it is necessary to understand the concepts of what makes an historic resource “significant” and what is meant by its “integrity.”

The Concept of Historic Significance

What makes a property historically significant? In general, properties must be at least 50 years old before they can be evaluated for potential historic significance, although exceptions do exist when a more recent property clearly is significant. Historic properties must have qualities that give them significance. A property may be significant for one or more of the following reasons:

- Association with events that contributed to the broad patterns of history, the lives of significant people or the understanding of San Antonio’s prehistory or history.
- Construction and design associated with distinctive characteristics of a building type, period or construction method.
- An example of an architect or master craftsman or an expression of particularly high artistic values.
- Integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association that form a district as defined by the *National Register of Historic Places Standards*, administered by the National Park Service.



A modest building can also be renovated to be compatible with the context. In this photograph the original millinery shop front had simple moldings at the top. (Compare with the photos below.)



Years later, all original detail had been stripped from the building. (Compare with the photos above and below.)



The same building (above) after renovation exhibits the more classical features of commercial storefronts, including a painted cornice, kickplate and recessed entry.

In most cases, a building is significant because it represents, or is associated with, a particular period in its history. Frequently, this begins with the founding of the community and continues through the peak of its historic activity. Buildings and sites that date from the period of significance typically contribute to the character of an historic district.

The Concept of Integrity

A historically significant structure or site must have integrity, in that a sufficient percentage of the structure must date from the period of significance. The majority of the building's structural system and materials should date from the period of significance and its character defining features also should remain intact. These may include architectural details, such as storefronts, cornices, awnings or canopies, ornamental brackets, window patterns, moldings and materials, as well as the overall mass and form of the building. It is these elements that allow a building to be recognized as a product of its own time.

Criteria To Use

If an historically significant building has an important, character defining feature that is deteriorated, altered or missing, it is clear that the feature should be repaired or, if repair is impossible, it should be replaced with materials that are similar to that which existed historically, to maintain the integrity of the building. Sometimes, under certain circumstances, replacing the missing feature or alteration with contemporary but compatible new features might be appropriate. (This approach would use a modern interpretation of the building element found traditionally on this building type. Historic details would not be copied literally yet the design should not impede one's ability to interpret the historic character of the structure.)

Thus there are two treatments which could be appropriate for repairing or replacing missing or altered features:

- **Option A:** Reconstruct the historic design
- **Option B:** Replace the missing or altered feature with a contemporary but compatible new feature

The Commission must determine which option (A or B) is appropriate when evaluating proposals for the replacement of deteriorated, non-historic alterations or missing historic features on historic buildings on Houston Street. There are three main criteria that the Commission will use to provide guidance in handling these types of situations:

- **First, what is the significance of the building?** If the building is a landmarked building or is of landmark quality and significance, then reconstruction is preferred. If the building is contributing to the historic sense of the street but is not landmark quality, then more flexibility may be allowed. Either replacing the feature using Option A or B may be appropriate.
- **Second, to what degree has the building retained its historic integrity and how important is the missing or altered feature to conveying the historic character of the building?** If the building has retained a high degree of its historic integrity and the missing feature is important to the building's character, then it should be reconstructed. If the building has been substantially altered, then both Options A and B can be considered.



This row of buildings had lost some details over time and a monochromatic color scheme obscures the original design character. Overhead garage doors that had replaced original storefronts were later alterations without historic significance. (Compare with the “after” photograph below.)



After rehabilitation, the row of buildings shown in the photograph above conveys a stronger sense of its historic character. Note that some old uses were retained, while other new uses were also introduced. Some non-contributing alterations were removed and storefronts reconstructed. One was retained, but was painted to minimize impacts.

This sequence of three photographs of the Hotel Savoy demonstrates how a consideration of integrity of features and significance of a property may affect a restoration strategy.



B. In the second photograph, taken in 1999, a portion of the cornice is missing, half the upper facade is covered and remaining upper story windows are blocked. Street level storefronts also area altered and he canopy is missing.

C. In the third image, taken in 2000, the metal covering has been removed, revealing the existing conditions. Many windows remain intact, although some are damaged. Although the building has lost some key features a sufficient amount remains and the building retains its historic significance and reconstruction of the missing features is merited. Adequate information also is available on which to base the reconstruction: The historic photograph and surviving details can be used to develop accurate replacements.

- **Third, what is the quality of information about the historic features of the building?** This criterion addresses the practical issue of whether or not the historic features literally can be replaced or replicated. There may not be sufficient information available about the historic feature to be confident that it can be replaced accurately. Generally, there are three types of information that might be available about the historic feature: pictures or architectural plans of the actual features, existing remnants of the historic features (including, marks on the building showing the outline of a feature), or examples of comparable features on existing buildings that were built at the same time and of the same general design. If pictures, plans, or remnants exist, then Option A should be followed. If they don't, Option B may be considered.



A. In the first image, taken ca. 1910, documents the historic character of the building and provides clear information about the design of key details, including the cornice and canopies.



Character-Defining Features

Character-defining features of historic buildings collectively establish a sense of place, provide human scale and add rich detail to the street and should be preserved (see discussion presented earlier in this chapter about the criteria the Commission should consider when replacing missing features.) Typical features include: the historic facade materials, decorative cornices, vertically-oriented upper-story windows, larger first-floor openings and trim around openings.

3.1 Preserve character-defining features that are intact.

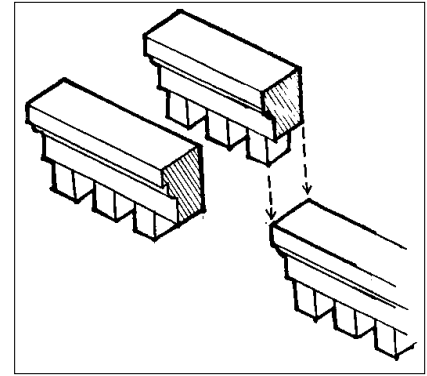
- Don't remove or damage character-defining features.
- Preserve intact features with appropriate maintenance techniques.

3.2 Repair those features that are damaged.

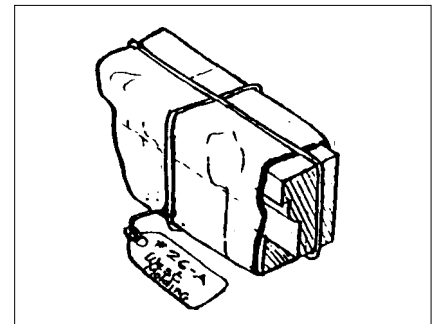
- Use methods that will not harm the historic materials. For example, repair work is preferred over replacement.
- When disassembly of an historic element is necessary for its repair, carefully identify how it will be stored during the rehabilitation project. Store it in a safe place until it is to be reinstalled.

3.3 Replace features that are missing or beyond repair.

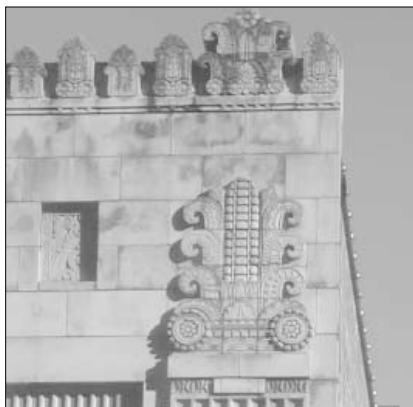
- Reconstruct only those portions that are beyond repair.
- Reconstruct the original element based on adequate evidence, if possible. This is the preferred option.
- If evidence is missing, a simplified interpretation of similar elements may be considered.



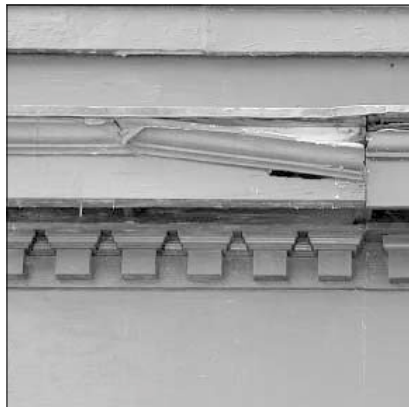
Replace features that are missing or beyond repair.



When disassembly of historic elements is necessary for its repair, carefully identify all pieces that will be stored during the rehabilitation project.



Preserve character-defining features that are intact.



Repair those features that are damaged.



Using historic photographs can help in determining the original character. (Compare with below.)



If a storefront is altered, consider restoring it to the original design. (Compare with the two photos of the same building below.)



This rehabilitation preserves surviving details and reconstructs missing ones.

Design of Alterations

Buildings may undergo alterations over time. New alterations often occur when original material is missing and new interpretations of traditional elements become necessary. These new alterations should be planned to preserve the building's integrity.

3.4 Design an alteration to be compatible with the historic character of the property.

- Avoid alterations that would hinder the ability to interpret the historic significance of the original building.
- Alterations that seek to imply an earlier period than that of the building are inappropriate. For example, don't apply "Colonial" details to an 1890s building.

3.5 Avoid alterations that damage historic features.

- For example, mounting a sign panel in a manner that causes decorative moldings to be damaged would be inappropriate.

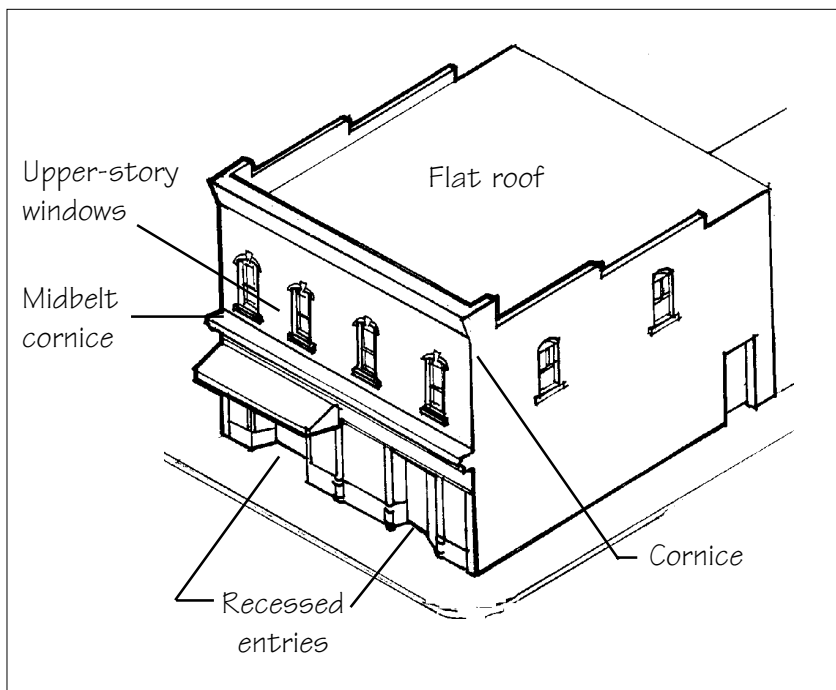


Where original details are missing, an alternative design that is a contemporary interpretation of a traditional storefront, as this one is, may be considered. The storefront still should be designed to provide interest to pedestrians.

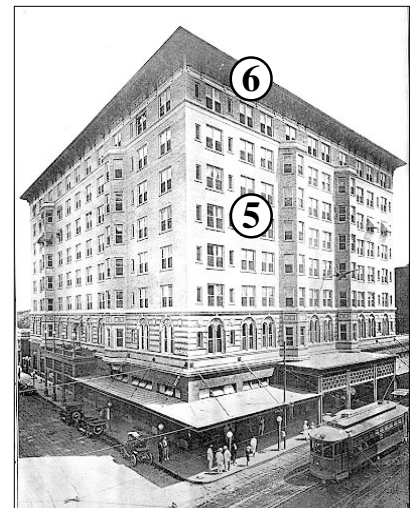
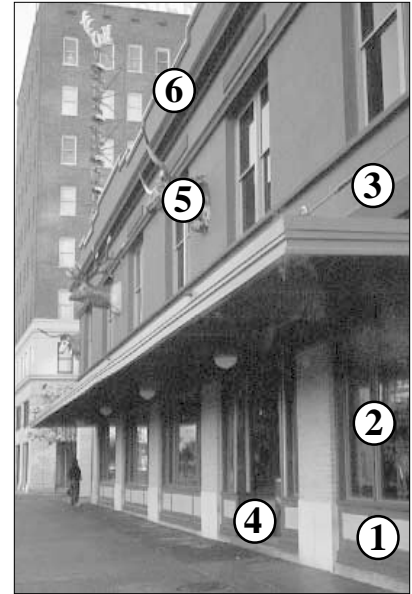
Storefronts

There are a number of basic storefront elements that appear in most styles of historic buildings on Houston Street. These character-defining elements are:

- **Kickplate:** Found beneath the display window. Sometimes called a bulkhead panel.
- **Display windows:** The main portion of glass on the storefront, where goods and services are displayed.
- **Transom:** The upper portion of the display, separated from the main display window by a frame.
- **Entry:** Usually set back from the sidewalk in a protected recess.
- **Upper-story windows:** Windows located above the street level. These usually have a vertical orientation, and appear to be less transparent than the large expanse of glass in the storefront below.
- **Cornice molding:** A decorative band at the top of the building. A **midbelt cornice** may sometimes be found separating some floors.



The renovation of a commercial structure should maintain the character-defining elements of the building type.



Typical storefront components include: 1) kickplate, 2) display windows, 3) sign band, 4) recessed entry, 5) upper story windows, and 6) cornice.



If an historically significant storefront opening has been altered, consider restoring it if the original condition can be determined. In this case, openings have been blocked down for smaller replacement windows. Returning to the original proportions is preferred.

Although these elements are common among buildings, many of the elements relate to the period of construction and style of architecture of the building and are thus presented differently. (See the discussion of building styles in Chapter 1.) If the storefront element(s) are defining of their architectural style or period of construction, they should be preserved.

However, on some buildings the specific design of individual storefront elements was not integral to the architectural style of the building. For example, in some styles, the position of the entryway is important to the design of the building, whereas in others it is not and its location moved around due to function. When this is the case and a feature (e.g., the location of the door) is not integral to the style of the building, it can be altered (e.g., the entryway can be moved or stairs to upstairs can be added.)



The windows in this structure were boarded and architectural details needed repair. (Compare with the photo below.)



Storefront windows were reopened and upper-story windows were repaired.

The repetition of the standard storefront elements creates a visual unity on the street that should be preserved. When planning for the rehabilitation of a storefront, an evaluation of the building's historic integrity should be made. Researching archival materials such as historic photos and building plans can be helpful in understanding the role of the storefront and its relationship to the building style and the street wall. An analysis of the existing building for any clues to the location of glass, window supports and transoms can also provide clues to a missing or altered storefront feature. Preserving significant historic storefronts or restoring an altered or missing storefront element are important preservation goals.

3.6 Preserve the historic character of a storefront when it is intact.

- This will help maintain the interest of the street to pedestrians.
- If the storefront glass is intact, it should be preserved.

3.7 If a storefront is altered, consider restoring it to the original design.

- If evidence of the original design is missing, use a simplified interpretation of similar storefronts. The storefront still should be designed to provide interest to pedestrians.

3.8 An alternative design that is a contemporary interpretation of a traditional storefront is appropriate.

- Where an original storefront or its elements are missing and no evidence of its character exists, a new design that uses the traditional elements may be considered.
- However, the design must continue to convey the characteristics elements of typical storefronts, including the transparent character of the display windows, recessed entries and cornices, to name a few. Also, the design should not impede one's ability to interpret the historic character of the structure.
- Altering the size of an historic window opening or blocking it with opaque materials is inappropriate.
- Note that in some cases an original storefront may have been altered early in the history of the building and the alterations have taken on significance. Such changes should be preserved.

Windows & Doors

Original windows and doors are important features that help convey the early character of a building. These elements should be preserved, when feasible.

3.9 Maintain an historically significant storefront opening.

- The size and shape of the storefront are important characteristics that contribute to the integrity of an historic commercial building. Avoid altering the shapes of these features.
- If these elements have already been altered, consider restoring them if their original condition can be determined.



Maintain an historically significant storefront opening. Altering the windows such as in this case is inappropriate.

3.10 Retain the original shape of the transom glass in an historic storefront.

- The upper glass band of a traditional storefront introduced light into the depths of a building. These bands are found on many historic storefronts, and they often align at the same height. The shape of the transom is important to the proportion of the storefront, and it should be preserved in its historic configuration, whenever possible.
- If the original glass is missing, install new glass. However, if the transom must be blocked, use it as a sign panel or a decorative band, but be certain to retain the original proportions.



Preserve historic upper-story windows. Repair the sash, rather than replace it, when feasible.

3.11 Preserve historic upper-story windows.

- Historically, upper-story windows had a vertical emphasis. The proportions of these windows contribute to the character of each commercial storefront. Don't block them down or alter their size.
- Consider reopening windows that are currently blocked.
- Maintain the historic sash as well. Repair the sash, rather than replace it, when feasible.



When the sash is deteriorated beyond repair, it should be replaced with materials that are similar to that which existed historically, to maintain the integrity of the building.



Retain the original shape of the transom glass in an historic storefront. Removing or covering up the transom opening is inappropriate.



Maintain the original decorative paving within a recessed entry.



Maintain a recessed entry.

Entries

The repetition of recessed entries provides a rhythm of shadows along the street that helps establish a sense of scale and identifies business entrances. This pattern should be maintained.

3.12 Maintain recessed entries where they are found.

- Restore the historic recessed entry if it has been altered.
- Avoid positioning an entry flush with the sidewalk.

3.13 Where an entry is not recessed, maintain it in its original position, when feasible.

- However, it may be necessary to comply with other code requirements, including door width, swing and construction. If so, an alteration may be considered.
- In some cases, entries must comply with accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Note, however, that some flexibility in application of these regulations is provided for historic properties.
- If the original storefront is missing and the location of the entry is not integral to the architectural style or period of construction of the building, it may be repositioned in keeping with the building style.



Maintain the original position and hierarchy of an entryway. Occasionally, the entry may be accented with a horizontal canopy

Awnings & Canopies

Historically awnings and especially canopies were noteworthy features on Houston Street and their continued use is encouraged. There were several types of canopies seen historically, most were pole mounted with a few wall-mounted types. (See discussion of awnings and canopies in Chapter Two.)

3.14 Preserve the canopy when it is intact.

- A metal canopy is appropriate on many historic building styles in San Antonio.

3.15 If a canopy is altered, consider restoring it to the original design.

- Restore the historic canopy if it has been altered.

3.16 An alternative design that is a contemporary interpretation of a traditional canopy is appropriate.

- Where the original canopy is missing and no evidence of its character exists, a new design that uses the traditional elements may be considered.
- However it must continue to convey the character of typical canopies of the buildings era.



Preserve the original canopy when it is intact.

A metal canopy is appropriate on many historic building styles in San Antonio.

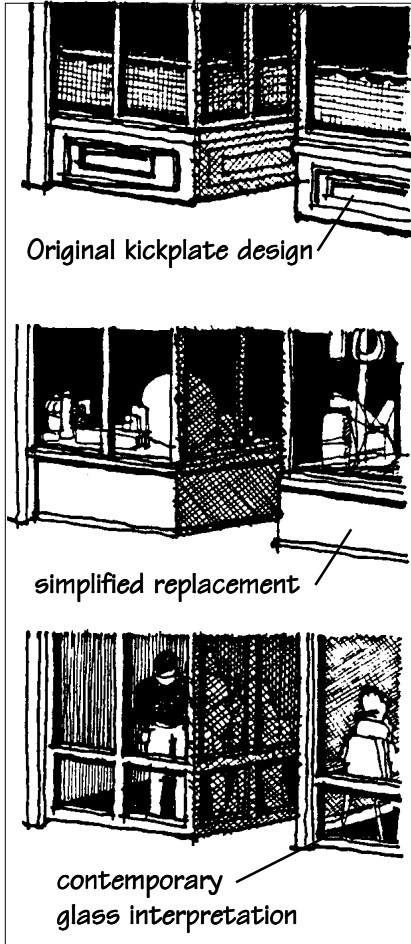


Historically awnings and especially canopies were noteworthy features on Houston Street and their continued use is encouraged, as shown in this early photo detail of the Moore Building.



Where the original canopy is missing and no evidence of its character exists, a new design that uses the traditional elements may be considered. The canopy in this photo is inappropriate since it does not match the shape of the window opening.





Retain the kickplate as a decorative panel. If the original is missing, develop a compatible replacement design.



Repair the original kickplate when feasible.

Kickplates

A kickplate, or bulkhead, was a popular feature of most commercial buildings. This feature should be preserved.

3.17 Retain an original kickplate as a decorative panel.

- The kickplate, located below the display window, adds interesting detail to the streetscape and should be preserved.

3.18 If the original kickplate is missing, develop a sympathetic replacement design.

- Wood, metal and masonry are appropriate materials for replacements.
- Coordinate the color of the kickplate with other trim elements on the building.



If the original kickplate is missing, develop a sympathetic replacement design. Here a transparent glass kickplate is used where a solid panel may have existed. However, the original proportions are still conveyed, which is appropriate.

Cornices

Most historic commercial buildings have cornices to cap their facades. Their repetition and general alignment along a street contribute to the visual continuity on a block and should be preserved.

3.19 Preserve the character of the cornice line of an historic building.

- This may be a straight or stepped parapet.

3.20 Reconstruct a missing cornice when historic evidence is available.

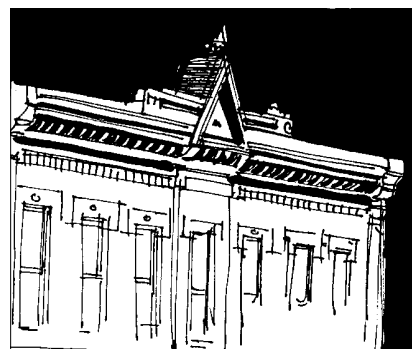
- Use early photographs to determine design details of an original cornice.
- The substitution of another old cornice for the original may be considered, provided that the substitute is similar in appearance to the original.

3.21 A simplified interpretation also is appropriate if evidence of the original is missing.

- Appropriate materials include stone, brick and stamped metal.



If the cornice is missing from a building, consider reconstructing it.



Reconstruct a missing cornice when historic evidence is available.



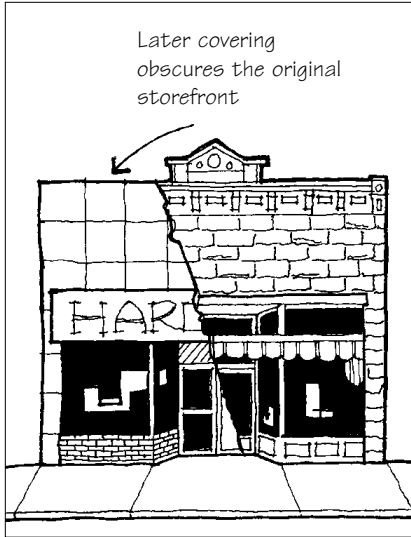
Reconstructing missing details, when sufficient information is available, is encouraged. In this case, the original cornice is missing in the photo at upper left. The central portion of the pediment is under construction, above. When completed, in the photo at lower left, the shadow lines from the cornice once again add interest to the building front.



A simplified interpretation also is appropriate if evidence of the original is missing.



Preserve the character of the cornice line with a replacement design.



Don't cover or obscure original facade materials.



If the original material has been covered, uncover it if feasible.

Facade Materials

Original exterior building materials provide a sense of scale and texture and often convey the work of skilled craftsmen. These original building materials should not be covered, damaged or removed.

3.22 Historic building materials and craftsmanship add textural qualities, as well as visual continuity and character to the streetscape, and should be preserved.

- Brick and stone have been the dominant building materials and their character and finish should be preserved.

3.23 Protect historic material surfaces.

- Don't use harsh cleaning methods, such as sandblasting, that could damage the finish of historic materials.
- If chemical cleaners are used, a test patch should be reviewed.

3.24 Protect masonry from water deterioration.

- Provide proper drainage so water does not stand on flat surfaces or accumulate in decorative features.
- Provide a means to drain water away from foundations to minimize rising damp. Do not permit downspouts to direct water to the foundation.
- DO NOT use a sealant, or clear coat, to protect masonry. A sealant will prevent proper breathing and cause moisture to be trapped inside the masonry.
- However, if masonry was painted historically, then it may be appropriate to repaint.

3.25 Don't cover or obscure original facade materials.

- Covering of original facades not only conceals interesting detail, but also interrupts the visual continuity along the street.
- If the original material has been covered, expose it if feasible.

3.26 If material replacement is necessary, use materials similar to those employed historically.

- Brick and stone were primary wall materials for most buildings. Wood and metal were used for window, door and storefront surrounds.
- Substitute materials may be used if they match the original in appearance, finish and profile.

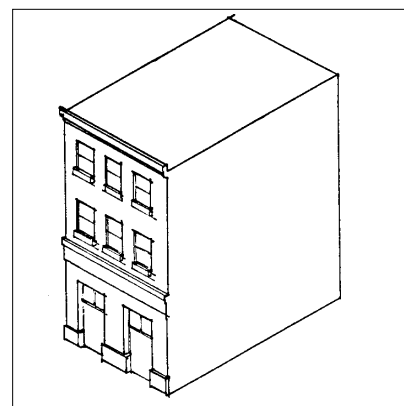
Design of Additions

Many buildings have experienced additions over time, as the need for more space occurred. An addition should be designed such that the historic character of the building can still be perceived. When planning a new addition to an historic structure, the negative effects that may occur should be minimized. While some destruction of original materials is almost always a part of constructing an addition, such loss should be minimized.

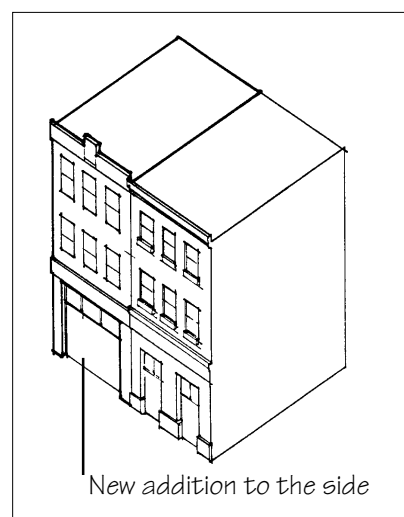
Three distinct types of additions should be considered. First, a ground-level addition that involves expanding the footprint of a structure may be considered. Such an addition should be to the rear or side of a building. This will have the least impact on the historic character of the structure, but there may only be limited opportunities to do this.

Second, an addition to the roof may be designed that is simple in character and set back substantially from the front of a building. In addition, the materials, window sizes and alignment of trim elements on the addition should be compatible to those of the existing structure.

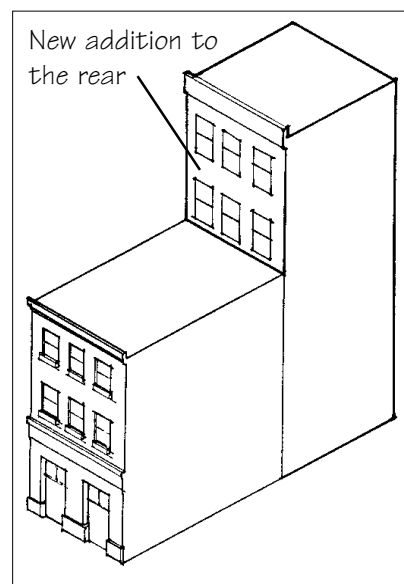
A third option, is to design an addition within the wall plane of the existing building. This option is the most difficult and requires great care to respect the historic relationship of the building to the street. Such an addition should provide a visual distinction between the existing structure and its addition. This may be accomplished through the use of a midbelt cornice element or a subtle change in building materials.

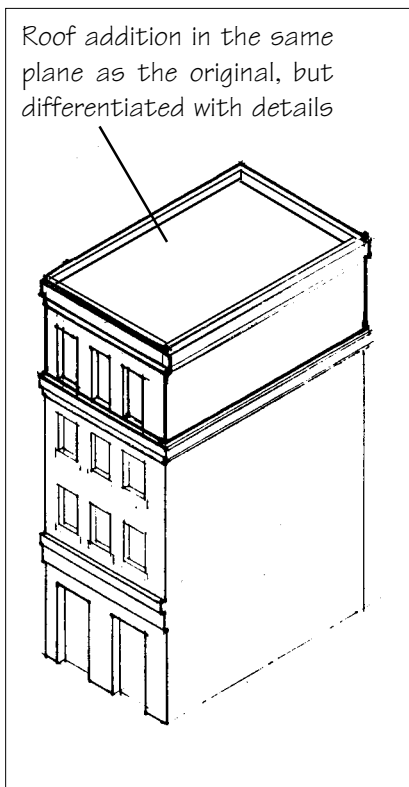
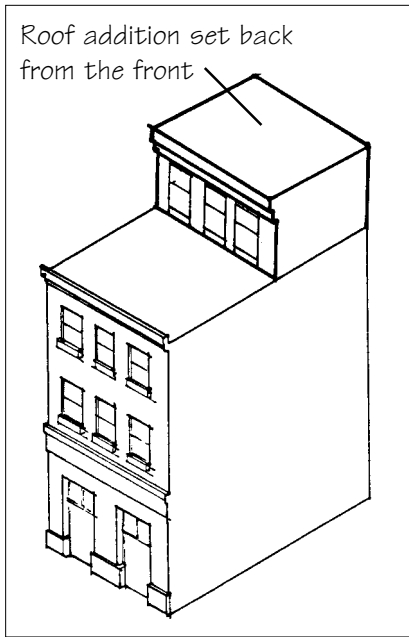


An original three-story building, before an addition. (Compare with sketches below and on the following page.)



An addition may be set back to preserve the perception of the historic scale of the building. In the image on the left, the original three floors of this building are visible. In the angle view at the right, two newer floors are visible. Note how the addition cannot be seen when looking at the building straight-on because it is setback.





Appropriate alternative approaches to additions.

3.27 An addition should be compatible in scale, materials and character with the main building.

3.28 An addition should not damage or obscure historically or architecturally important features.

- For example, loss or alteration of a cornice line should be avoided.

3.29 Design an addition such that the historic character of the original building can still be interpreted.

- A new addition that creates an appearance inconsistent with the historic character of the building is inappropriate. For example, an addition that is more ornate than the original building would be out of character.
- An addition that seeks to imply an earlier period than that of the building also is inappropriate because it would confuse the history of the building.

3.30 An addition should be subtly distinguishable from the historic building.

- An addition should be made distinguishable from the historic building, even in subtle ways, so that the character of the original can be interpreted.

3.31 An addition may be made to the rear or side of a building if it does the following:

- An addition should maintain the alignment of storefront elements, moldings, cornices and upper-story windows that exist on the main part of the building and its surrounding context.

3.32 An addition may be made to the roof of a building if it does the following:

- An addition should be set back from the primary, character-defining facade, to preserve the perception of the historic scale of the building.
- Its design should be modest in character, so it will not attract attention from the historic facade.
- The addition should be distinguishable as new, albeit in a subtle way.

3.33 In limited circumstances, an addition may be made to the roof of a building and not be set back from character-defining facades, if it does the following:

- An addition should be distinguished from the existing building. A change in material or a decorative band can be considered to accomplish this.
- An addition should maintain the alignment of storefront elements, moldings, cornices and upper-story windows that exist on the main part of the building and its surrounding context.
- The addition should also be compatible in scale, texture and materials with the original.



These early photos of the Moore building illustrate historic precedence for a rooftop addition. This addition can be distinguished from the original building on the left by providing a simple decorative band. Although the towers were removed, the original cornice was replaced at the top of the building.

